

Name: John R. THOMAS -- Coxswain USN
USS Oklahoma BB 37

Time Period: December 6--December 7, 1941

Suprise Inspection--Suprise Attack

The Battleship, USS Oklahoma returned to Pearl Harbor approximately 9 AM, Saturday December 6, 1941, after several days at sea participating in fleet manoeuvres. The crew was informed to prepare the ship for a "suprise Admiral's inspection" scheduled for 9 AM Monday, December 8, 1941.

All hands turned too, preparing the ship to a top shipshape condition. At approximately 4:10 PM Saturday, word was passed for a division Petty officer to report to the ship's Postoffice and pick up the division mail for their respective division. I picked up the mail, and as I returned to my division living compartment, I fanned through the stack of letters and finding one from my mother, I decided to read it. It was then, I heard the order "Atteention on deck". I looked up to see the ship's Captain being escorted by the Chief Master at Arms, making a personal inspection of the ship, in regards to the up coming Admiral's Inspection. The Captain saw me reading my letter, approached me and inquired, "Sailor, what are you doing?" I replied that I had just picked up the division mail and seeing the letter from my mother, I decided to read it. He angrily asked, "don't you realize this is still working hours?" He then turned to the chief master at arms and said, "Throw him in the brig". The chief replied, "I will take care of that just as soon as we complete our inspection".

Realizing that brig time was usually a minimum of 10 days on bread and water, with no shower, I decided to take a shower before the chief returned for me. While I was taking the shower, the chief returned. He was told of my where abouts. Realizing it was late in the day, he left word for me to report to him on the quarterdeck at 8 AM Sunday morning, and to be prepared to enter the brig. Next morning I ate a full breakfast and headed for my 8 AM appointment. Upon reaching the quarterdeck at 7:55 AM, I saw the officer of the deck running to the ship's address system, passing the word for "all hands, man your battle stations. Those Japs are here, dropping real torpedos and bombs". I was saved from the brig, only to find my ship was being sunk with a loss of 436 shipmates. World War II had begun.